

ADEPT Political Commentaries

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The project of federalisation of the Republic of Moldova

Igor Botan, 3 July 2003

1. One year after the launch of the Kiev project

One year ago, on 3 July 2002, the OSCE project on the resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict through the federalisation of the Republic of Moldova was launched in Kiev. The optimism of the authors of the project, who intended to see the conflict resolved by the end of 2002, has taken the public opinion by surprise. During the 10 years while the conflict has been frozen on the two banks of the Nistru River two different state entities have been built. Therefore, one could hardly imagine that the existent status quo could be changed quickly. In addition, a number of experts believe that in Transdnistria multiple economic and other obscure interests held by various Moldovan and CIS neighbouring subjects and organisations converge.

Judging by the articles of the OSCE project one could assume that Moldova was to be turned into a classical federation by the model of the Russian Federation. Likewise, Transdnistria was to be granted, as a result of Moldova's decentralisation, the status of federation subject; a delimitation of competencies between the federal centre and the subjects was to be worked out within the proposed federation. The things that have prompted most questions have been the lack of any indication as to the number of subjects that the proposed federation was to include, as well as the fact that the OSCE project was to have primacy over the Moldovan Constitution right after its signature by the President of Moldova and the leader of Tiraspol administration.

Therefore, from the start, the OSCE project was subjected to criticism by the political opposition in Moldova, which, in its turn, was criticised by the official mass media for its adverse position. In reply, the opposition parties dedicated a special meeting of the Round Table with Permanent Status to the topic, during which they adopted a Proclamation envisaging a series of alternative actions for solving the conflict. Curiously, for a long period of time the Moldovan authorities avoided to express their own position with regard to the issue of federalisation of Moldova and have thus shown that they were interested to see the reaction of the opposition first.

In Transdnistria things have been pretty clear since a long time. After the head of the Tiraspol foreign department expressed his positive view of the OSCE project, immediately after it was made public in Kiev, he fell into the disgrace of the Transdnistrian leader Igor Smirnov.

It was only on the eve of the OSCE Summit in Porto in December 2002, when the Moldovan and Transdnistrian authorities were expected to express their official position with regard to the OSCE project, did things clear up a bit. First, it became clear that, in general terms, neither the Moldovan nor the Transdnistrian authorities approved of the OSCE project provisions, save for their principle agreement to solve the conflict through federalisation. This has manifested in the diplomatic victory of Tiraspol that succeeded, on the very eve of the Porto summit, to persuade the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova and the representatives of guarantors (Russia and Ukraine) to sign a protocol whereby they committed to support the creation of a "contractual federation" between two equal subjects: Moldova and Transdnistria. This

meant, in fact, giving up the initial OSCE draft, which allowed for granting Transdnistria the status of subject of federation through the de jure decentralisation of Moldova. De facto, Transdnistria has not been part of Moldova for a long time and, therefore, it was logical for the Transdnistrian leaders to invoke the provisions of the 8 May 1997 Memorandum signed between Chisinau and Tiraspol, which refers to the equality of parties to the conflict. Hence the obsessive idea of building a "contractual federation" between two equal subjects.

In consequence, only in February 2003, President Voronin overcame yet another critical stage and proposed to draft the new Constitution of the federation, together with Transdnistrian representatives. Thus, all that has been taken from the OSCE project was the notion of "federal state". However, as expected, the process of drafting the new constitution got into a stalemate. More than two months have passed since the constitution of the joint Moldovan-Transdnistrian commission tasked with the drafting of the Constitution, but the activity thereof remains blocked. A number of causes for this have been invoked, such as the lack of co-ordination in determining the number of representatives of the two parties, the working site etc. If such things have not been co-ordinated in advance, then neither were the principle of functioning and decision making of the commission. But these are purely functional problems, the important thing is that even if these issues had been settled well in advance, the commission would still have not been able to function normally. This is due to the simple reason that the "architects" of the new constitution have not been provided with the basic parameters of the new state entity that the two "beneficiaries" from Chisinau and Tiraspol would like to craft.

On the one hand, both "beneficiaries" crafted in the territories controlled by them their own "vertical axes of power", which they do not want to give up. Therefore, it is practically impossible to make the two axes coaxial. Judging by all appearances, for President Voronin the reintegration of the country is synonymous with creating an "asymmetrical federation", that is annihilating the Tiraspol "vertical axis of power". For the Tiraspol leader, Igor Smirnov, the "common state" that is to be created by Moldova and Transdnistria on equal terms could be a "contractual federation" where there would not be much interference between the competencies of the two "vertical axes of power". The most curious thing is that following the May 2003 seminar organised by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for Moldovan and Transdnistrian MPs, one of the deputy chairs of the Moldovan Parliament said that the most important conclusion of the seminar was that before starting to draft the federal constitution it is important for the parties to sign a "political document" to set by joint agreement the basic principles of the future Moldovan federation. Only then could the experts in the joint commission proceed with the drafting of the federative constitution itself. It would be naive to believe that before the OSCE seminar these things were not known. It is believed that the joint commission is but a cover that the parties to the conflict use until the changes in regional political configuration offers them new opportunities to impose their points of view.

In the meantime, things are getting worse. The Transdnistrian leader Igor Smirnov threatens to stop co-operating with Moldova in solving the conflict. On 30 June 2003 he addressed the Transdnistrian citizens and threatened to take measures in response to what he calls "economic blockade" by Moldova. From the point of view of the Tiraspol leaders, by "economic blockade" they mean the obligation of Transdnistrian

economic agents to respect the Moldovan customs rules for import-export operations and the requirement that the Transnistrian economic agents register with the Moldovan Chamber of Commerce to be issued certificates certifying the country of origin of exported goods. From Smirnov's statements one can conclude that only out of "respect for the guarantors (Russia and Ukraine) and the OSCE" he does not block Moldova's transport and energy supply networks, as he did during the 1992 armed conflict. The Transnistrian authorities have already blocked the process of withdrawal of the Russian army from the region, breaching Smirnov's decree on "ensuring the necessary measures for honouring by Russia of its obligation to withdraw its army from the eastern region of Moldova".

2. Possible consequences of the new crisis

In this extremely tense situation, the news about the recent meeting in Tiraspol of the Transnistrian leader Igor Smirnov with the newly elect General Mayor of Chisinau Serafim Urechean is presented by the state TV channel as an act of undermining the political stability in the country. There are a number of reasons for such unhealthy reaction. Firstly, both Smirnov and Urechean are regarded as the main "political foes" of President Voronin. Evidence to this is the fact that the governmental press has not hesitated to label both of them as Mafia guys and corrupted bandits etc. Obviously, the co-operation of the main "political foes" raises concerns. Secondly, due to circumstances, Serafim Urechean has really become the main political opponent of the Communist Party and President Voronin following his victory over the communist candidate in the recent elections for general mayor of Chisinau. The threat that President Voronin made at Urechean in his recent address to the citizens have forced the latter to take measures of protection. The threats have manifested in the permanent harassment and appeals against the results of elections in courts of highest rank.

Obviously, for the representatives of the ruling party and the state press it is quite shocking that the main opponent of the head of state goes to Tiraspol to discuss with the secessionist leader "socio-economic issues", while Vladimir Voronin is declared there persona non grata. Finally, Urechean's visit to Tiraspol has taken place practically at the same time with the visit to the region of the two socialist parties, who stated that the conflict needs to be solved on the basis of equality of the two subjects. This could have been a mere coincidence, but also co-operation.

One of the most interesting questions refers to the advantages that the Mayor of Chisinau Serafim Urechean might gain from his co-operation with the secessionist leader Igor Smirnov. First, this co-operation may be interpreted as an elementary measure of protection against the harassment by the CPM. The co-operation between Urechean and Smirnov has taken place exactly when the CPM started to dispute the results of Urechean's re-election to Mayor of Chisinau. Under these circumstances, an eventual declaration of the results of elections null and the announcement of repeat elections in Chisinau could increase Urechean's rating with the most disciplined part of the Moldovan electorate, the Russian speaking voters. Most of the Romanian speaking population considers Urechean, as compared to the communist candidate, as the "least evil". Therefore, the ostentatious action by Urechean might be aimed at discouraging the CPM representatives to cancel the results of the election. It is true that there are other factors that should calm down the vengeful spirits of the CPM.

Right after the end of elections, during which the ruling party made great promises, things have taken an opposite turn. The price of bread has risen, as did tariffs on gas and electricity. But this is an immediate task.

Urechean's move could be a long way shot too. In any case, one can assume that Moldova will be imposed the resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict through federalisation. The right wing political forces are opposed to this scenario in any case, yet the guarantors (Russia and Ukraine), the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the USA have all supported the resolution of the conflict through federalisation of Moldova. At present, Voronin's "asymmetrical federation" and Smirnov's "contractual" one seem to be two extremes of the federalisation process. Although Urechean has evasively expressed his point of view on the federalisation of Moldova, it is not excluded that Urechean puts forward a middle solution of a classical federation. For this, there's no need for a special effort. It is only necessary to reanimate the OSCE project, made public a year ago, which includes the main provisions about the constitution of a classical federation. This assumption is based on the fact that the media affiliated to the mayor of Chisinau has already reported that it would be convenient for Chisinau to become a subject of the proposed federation, and the governmental and state press have blamed the mayor of Chisinau of "economic secessionism". This sort of clashes have emerged during the recent electoral campaign when the mayor of Chisinau had to face attacks by the pro-Communist press which blamed him of the disastrous state of Chisinau. The answer of the mayor was that the Government leaves less than 1/3 of returns accumulated in Chisinau to cover the needs thereof.

If things were to go in this direction it is certain that Urechean would win the sympathies of the citizens from the autonomous region Gagauz Yeri, whose leaders have long talked about the need to grant the region the status of a subject of the federation. For the secessionist leaders in Tiraspol, restrained by the "economic blockade", a compromise with Urechean to the disadvantage of the CPM would not seem to be too offensive.

There are also great risks related to this. First, this could endanger the constitution of the Social Liberal Alliance made up of three parties: Alliance of Independents (AI) (led by Serafim Urechean), Social Democratic Alliance (SDA) and Liberal Party (LP), as the main political opposition formation that could provide a real alternative to the communist force. In any case, for the merger of AI and SDA, federalisation is not an obstacle. SDA has often expressed its public consent to the plan of federalisation of Moldova. Beyond doubt, in the LP there could emerge problems related to accepting federalisation in general and Urechean's contacts with Smirnov in particular. Without the LP, the would be united formation would gain votes from the Russian speakers, at the expense of the CPM, but will lose a considerable number of votes of Romanian speakers to the right-wing parties. In any case, the ones with limited possibilities seem to be the CPM. It is possible that this is the ultimate aim sought by Urechean and his entourage. Two years ago, the press affiliated with the ex-president Lucinschi, currently supporting the AI and SDA wrote that in Moldova it is imperiously necessary to set up a democratic political force of pro-Russian orientation in order to avoid Russian support exclusively to the CPM, which declared itself of pro-Russian orientation. That things are so the statements of high Russian officials show with reference to the results of the recent local elections in Moldova.

At the first sight, the risks that Urechean has assumed are not so big. First, the most important right-wing parties have been vehemently criticising him already. Secondly, his real influence on the process of federalisation is at present an insignificant one to attribute him certain responsibility for the possible consequences. Therefore, Urechean's recent move seems to entail certain political prospects. On the other hand, an eventual federalisation of Moldova on the condition of giving Transdnistria the right to influence Moldova's foreign policy could seriously endanger the far-off prospects of Moldova's integration into the EU, which thing would have extremely negative consequences.

Political Parties and European Integration

Stefan Gorda, 7 July 2003

1. A brief historical outlook
2. Parties' visions of the concept of normality
3. European integration as a pragmatic objective of the parties and a model of development

1. A brief historical outlook

In the Republic of Moldova, the European option has first gained shape in the administrative structures rather than inside the political parties. For the first time the Moldovan authorities expressed their intention to pursue European integration in 1997 when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs drafted a relevant letter, which was later signed by the President and sent to the European Commission. Following the relative victory of pro-European forces in the 1998 elections, the idea of European integration has become a dominant theme in the domestic political discourse. After the Russian financial crisis of 1998, the Alliance for Democracy and Reforms, which held the majority in Parliament at the time, voted in 1998 for a decision to designate European integration "a major strategic objective for our country." On 1 July 1998, the EU-Moldova Partnership and Co-operation Agreement entered into force and instituted an institutional basis for the EU-Moldova relations. Some members of the legislative body would put forward various proposals to create a specialised department or even ministry and take firmer action, including leave the CIS. However, the configuration of forces in the Parliament did not allow for those proposals to materialise. In 2000, following intense consultations, 25 political and social formations, notoriously with the exception of the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM), signed a Document-Appeal calling for a nation-wide consensus on the objective of European integration. In 1998-2001, parliamentary and governmental delegations worked consistently in order to orient Moldova towards European integration and thus laid the foundation for a permanent co-operation with the EU.

In the 2001 electoral campaign, the liberal, Christian democratic and social democratic parties tried to win votes under the flags of national rebirth, reforms and European integration. Still acting as an anti-system party, back then the CPM deemed wrong the pledge for national rebirth and modernization on the basis of capitalism and liberal democracy. The communists vehemently criticised the foreign policy of the previous governments and promised that if they won the elections they would pledge for Moldova joining of the Russia-Belarus Union. On 25 February 2001, the CPM gained the absolute majority in the new Parliament. The attempt by the CPM to impose non-popular decisions likely to restore the *status quo* of the Soviet period were toughly sanctioned and the Christian Democratic Party organised ample street manifestations for about three months. One of the favourite slogans of the demonstrators, who were mainly young, was "We want to go to Europe". In spring of 2002, the Christian democrats proposed to organise a referendum on Moldova joining the EU and NATO, but the proposal was rejected by the authorities. The mediation of the Council of Europe put an end to the demonstrations. At the same time, the Social-Democratic Alliance, a parliamentary party, the Liberal Party, not represented in

Parliament, and a number of other parties set up a Round Table with Permanent Status which was supposed to be an alternative to the communist excesses and the street demonstrations. The Round Table was to identify solutions to defend the democratic values, continue the reforms and enhance efforts at European integration. On 5 June 2002, a series of political parties from the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition, as well as a few non-governmental organisations signed an Appeal to the President calling upon him to set up the National Commission for European Integration to draft the Strategy of European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, i.e. her joining the EU. The CPM failed to sign the Appeal, although later, in view of the domestic and external circumstances, its leaders, who were also in government, pursued a number of opposition proposals. The Statement of the participants in the Round Table of 2 October 2002 singled out in relation to the proposal by the communist President Voronin to set up a National Commission for European Integration that the official application for EU membership by the Moldovan authorities would be a first concrete action to justify the proclamation of European integration as the foreign policy priority of Moldova. The change in the message of the state leadership has been noted in Brussels too, and a statement adopted in October 2002 saluted "the European aspirations of the Republic of Moldova and its serious intentions to deepen the general relations with the EU". In November 2002, the President issued the Decree on founding the National Commission for European Integration, which was charged to draft and submit to Parliament the Strategy of European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, draft and approve the action plan to apply the said strategy and co-ordinate the application of the plan.

Thus, both the political opposition and the active part of the society have succeeded in imposing a fundamentally important decision for the European future of our country, a decision which will have an irreversible nature after and if Moldova applies officially for membership. Although the Communist Party has not programmed European integration as a political priority, and despite its categorical victory in the 2001 elections, its earlier decisions are still in force. The leadership of the Republic of Moldova has been stating ever more fervently that it will further pursue European integration. At least three hypotheses may be formulated with regard to this new approach of the CPM. It could be a provisional manoeuvre, one dictated by contingencies, an eventual considerable change in the political programme of the communists through an abandon of their ideology, or the prevalence of political pragmatism, of the *Realpolitik*. The opposition has regarded with scepticism and suspicion this new approach of the communists being aware of CPM earlier positions. The leaders of the opposition have doubted not only the seriousness of the rulers regarding this idea, but also their very ability to rule the country. Thus, the Alliance of Independents believes that Moldova needs - now more than ever, a pragmatic, credible and efficient political alternative. The Liberal Party has warned: "the political direction promoted by the communist leadership leaves one with ever fewer hopes with regard to Moldova's chances to meet the political, economic and social European standards".

In mid 2002, we thus witnessed a stratagem of the communists who declared European integration the principal direction of the government and thereby assumed the pro-European rhetoric and passed the hostilities into the opposition's field. Since then, the criticism against the policy of the ruling party is always made with the

mention that in the issue of European integration the actions of the government seem to be driven by the logic of the objective tendencies on the continent.

2. Parties' visions of the concept of normality

On the issue of European integration there is to be made, nonetheless, a systemic distinction between the opposition and the ruling party, which resides chiefly in their differing visions of the concept of normality. While the majority of political parties have conceived the Soviet period as one of occupation and the independence and European integration as a reversal to normality, the CPM regards the "Soviet values" as beneficial ones. If one paraphrases the plastic formula of the social liberals, one can say that the opposition aspires towards European integration facing the future, while the communists adopt the European idea more facing the past. Whereas the Christian democratic, liberal, social liberal and social democratic parties advocate for reforms to abolish the communist mentality and practices, the message of the ruling party is intent on creating the impression that many of the "socialist achievements" could be applied today. The opposition parties pledge for denationalisation and privatisation and for decreasing the role of the state in the economic processes, while the communists' programme, truthfully reflected in the government activity, refers to moving backwards and a comeback to economic guidance and planning, increasing the weight and role of the state and collective sector and the Soviet administrative model. The democratic parties believe that the 1988-1989 National Movement "has liberated us from the patterns of an anachronic world and has offered us the chance to return to the European realm where we belong naturally". The communists interpret the same events as ones that have put an end to a period of prospering and, hence, independence is a result of previous mistakes and of the global capitalist conspiracy. The communists have not yet given up their "invaluable Soviet spiritual legacy", while the opposition is wary of the gravity of problems caused by the "mentality of Soviet type, which is primitive, egalitarian and docile to any sort of power." To conciliate these two diametrically opposed visions is almost impossible, and yet the task of European integration requires consensus on recent history.

3. European integration as a pragmatic objective of the parties and a model of development

The programmes of various Moldovan political parties include more or less coherent references to the re-dimensioning of the external actions of our state around the objective of European integration. To make the retrospection easier, we will take an overview of Moldovan parties, from right to left, which is not intended as a classification thereof by their degree of *Europeanness*.

People's Christian Democratic Party believes that the Republic of Moldova needs to adopt a firm and irreversible position with regard to integration into the EU and NATO. The prospect of joining the EU is to become the sole realistic and viable strategy of development of the state, which can succeed only if it gathers a wide national consensus and is conscientiously and honestly shared by the power, the opposition and the entire society. The Christian democrats stress that "joining in the foreseeable future the EU is for us a major strategic objective. The European

orientation involves legislative and structural reforms, the normal functioning of democratic institutions, the respect for human rights, the exercise of government according to European practices and the fulfilment of all recommendations and requirements of the Council of Europe and the EU".

Liberal Party opts for the priority of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, through a maximal match of the political, economic and security structures of Europe. The political priority of Moldova is integration into the European Union. For this purpose, the following must be achieved: "modernisation, based on the west European values, of the society and the state, taking into account, at the same time, the specific conditions and traditions of our people". The conclusion of our state building efforts involves setting up a national entity favourable to modernisation and European integration, which would ensure the strict obeisance of laws by all citizens and by all state and public institutions. The Liberal Party has announced that it will draft and later apply a series of wide-ranging economic, social and cultural programmes to align the Republic of Moldova to the European standards on a relatively short term.

Alliance of Independents speaks of "adjusting the Moldovan peculiarities to the EU requirements". The party pleads for more efforts at the gradual integration of Moldova into the EU. "The lack of a strategic plan of European integration is Moldova's biggest weakness". No government has ever had such a plan and that is why the reforms have not been properly concluded.

Social-Democratic Alliance reminds that Moldova's integration into the European structures needs "adjusting all standards - political, economic, human rights and freedoms". This is the way towards edifying a socially oriented market economy, founded on the principles of modernisation and development and able to capitalise on all resources and capabilities of the Moldovan society, so that our people can take its well deserved place in the family of European civilisation, the Alliance's programme reads.

Social-Liberal Party believes that by reactivating the economic potential and self-determination, Moldova can go for a change that would gradually bridge the gap with the rest of Europe in order to catch the 'train' of European integration. The place of Moldova in the new European geopolitical landscape, still in the process of configuration, will be decided upon by the results of our own development efforts, the performance of our economic agents and the capacity to manage our resources efficiently. The party reminds that the individual effort is the fundamental source of improvement, in the context of ample economic and cultural integration in the contemporary world. As for the European integration, the role of the state is essential. The state has the duty to prepare the national economy for compatibility with the EU norms, and apply such active commercial, industrial and agricultural policies as to make the Moldovan production export oriented and attract foreign investments. The state should support through balanced protection the becoming and enhancement of the local capital, in accordance with the commercial agreements signed with our foreign partners. Special attention should be paid to programmes seeking to foster the competitiveness of our national economy.

Social-Democratic Party stresses that Moldova's joining of the EU is totally consonant with the basic parameters of the societal model adopted by the party. Thus, the social democrats demand speeding up the drafting of the National Strategy of joining the EU. Obviously, Moldova does have certain economic and intellectual potential that could contribute efficiently to the edification of a stable and prosperous Europe once integrated.

Democratic Party mentions the issue of European integration only indirectly by proposing to "implement the European democratic values".

Communist Party approaches the subject of European integration and refers to the need "to integrate into the CIS and the European space", and believes that to get closer to the EU it is enough to adjust the CIS standards to those of the EU. The ruling party does not have a European model of development for the Republic of Moldova and recommends, in its programme, to undergo two stages in order to overcome the current crisis. In the first stage the communists will go for "removing the consequences of reforms, stopping the illicit privatisation of collective property, reanimating the economic, technical and scientific potential of the country and going back to the former model of social relations". In the next stage of reviving socialism, the party intends to ensure the "direct participation of the working class in the leadership of the state. A passage to the socialist organisation of the economy aimed at meeting the needs of the social class will be achieved". The communists' policy seeks to "build socialism with the ultimate end of building communism". It is worth looking in more detail at the position of communists, since they are the ruling party, and their conversion to the European idea is a singular experience of its sort. The programme of the CPM clearly indicates what its attitude to economic integration is, and specifies: "despite the reform of the capitalism, its essence remains the same - to explore cheap labour forces." This, the communist programme writes, "leads to heterogeneous development and the exploration of some countries by others". The communists believe that "an argument in this sense is the tendency of western states to subdue the Moldovan economy, impose itself in our market and enter into the possession of our property, press unfair contracts on us, grant us credits under suffocating terms and accentuate our state's dependency on foreign creditors." In March 2003, the CPM newspaper *Comunistul* published a methodical indication in which the secretary of the central committee of the CPM and chairman of the parliamentary standing committee for foreign policy admitted that the idea of raising Moldova's foreign debt while getting it deeper into the integration process is very popular among the party inner circles. The party members were reported to delve on what would be more convenient: to retain membership of various European organisations or carry out social programmes. The analysis of the CPM programme and publications begs the conclusion that the issue of regional integration is often regarded in the context of social antagonisms of Marxist type, and the objective trend towards regional integration is judged in pronounced anti-globalisation terms.

In its dialogue with the outside world, the communist leaders avoid to attack overtly the system set up during the years of independence and declare themselves advocates of democratic values, the market economy and the open society. However, the opposition parties believe that through the policy promoted by the government and the institutions controlled by the CPM, the system of pluralist democracy, market economy and foreign investments in the real sector of the economy, which is a key

element of the European integration policy, are being undermined from within. The Liberal Party declared that the process of nationalisation, promoted by the rulers against the principles of the market economy, started by liquidating the "Eurofarm" Group and, later, "Drezdenbank" - the partner of "Air Moldova", as well as "Sudzucker", "Lafarge" and other western companies. The intimidation of the largest yet foreign investor in Moldova, the Spanish "Union Fenosa", manifested in the "rulings of a corrupt judiciary, totally controlled by the government, creates an extremely unfavourable image for our state and compromises our chances of getting connected to the European political and economic processes".

The successive governments that come to power without clear projects, learn from experience and often implement their opponents' programmes create incertitude and weaken the social basis for European integration. Our current government is no exception to this rule, and it has needed two years to understand that there is no alternative to Moldova's European integration. The political parties have different visions on the strategic objective of European integration, especially on the place and role of the state in this process, the concrete ways of reforming and adjusting the Moldovan economy and society to the community standards, the structure of economy and property, the role of foreign investment, the administrative model, the role of the civil society etc. From the point of view of a concrete and responsible approach to the complexity of their tasks, our political parties are still immature and unprepared. Their predilection for macro modelling and schematics may be fatal for the mobilisation of all social strata and of the entire society towards achieving the objective of European integration. Those political parties that pretend to have coherent projects have yet to get over the stage of general declarations of sharing and joining in the efforts at European integration and plan the existential trajectory of the 4.5 million people for the next 10-15 years, i.e. encapsulate 4.5 million mini-projects into their global project of European integration. The people's approval of the idea of European integration is directly proportional with the interest that each of the 4.5 million might take in the mini-project developed by his/her party. Otherwise, parties risk getting as much support for European integration as they did for building communism. If people will not see their interests reflected in the projects of European integration, there is little hope that the development and modernisation of Moldova will enjoy the individual input of its every citizen and the sum of all energies nationwide.

Political parties between the EU and the CIS

Stefan Gorda, 14 July 2003

A defining element for understanding the position of parties on the issue of European integration is the way they conceive the geopolitical orientation of our state. This is even more salient as high European officials have been indicating more overtly that as Moldova gets closer to the European structures, it will have to decide whether it wants to join the EU or the CIS.

People's Christian Democratic Party regards the time factor as a very pressing one. To find a right place in the future European architecture, the state has to undertake an energetic European offensive to persuade its European partners of the seriousness of Moldova's European commitments. Our membership of the Community of Independent States (CIS), as well as the intention of our current government to integrate Moldova into the Russia-Belarus Union are insurmountable barriers in the way of our joining the EU. Our chances to join the EU depend, decisively, on our capacity to align with a group of countries in the South East European region. Association to this group of states involves abandoning the group of states in which Moldova is currently included, together with Belarus and Ukraine, these two states being dominated by serious problems that should not affect our country's pace of European integration. Surprisingly, these proposals of the Christian democrats are explicit in the positions of our current government. Yet, unlike the authorities, the PCDP, along with the Liberal Party, remind that the current geopolitical context and our strategic interests oblige Moldova to take into account the existent complementarity between the EU and NATO. It is necessary for the state to become aware of the logic underpinning the eastern enlargement of the two organisations. Moldova needs to go the same way that the countries of Central and South Eastern Europe have gone, for which joining NATO was initially a determinant factor in their later efforts at joining the EU. To accomplish this objective, Moldova will have to give up its permanent neutrality status, which is "an out of date and inefficient principle of defending national security. The NATO military dimension should not be a pretext for Moldova's withdrawal from its Euro-Atlantic integration".

Liberal Party believes that Moldova is an integral part of the European cultural space and the main effort in safeguarding a natural place in the European architecture is integration - unequivocal - in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

The Social Democratic Alliance of Moldova is a proponent of integration into the European structures and at the same time opts for maintaining traditional relations between Moldova and the countries to its East. European Integration in no way contravenes or rule out the continuation and enhancement of relations between Moldova and the CIS states. Contacts and relations with the Euro-Atlantic structures, first of all NATO, are to be oriented "towards consolidating stability and global peace, with the necessary respect for the country's neutrality".

Believing that joining the EU is for Moldova a strategic objective, the **Social Democratic Party** "in no way approves of moving our relations with the CIS partners in the background". They are "firmly convinced that the inefficiency of this community in relation to the initial expectations is largely due to the passivity of the

governments in the member states, the lack of initiative and insistence in promoting mutually advantageous co-operation. This is also true of the Moldovan authorities who have failed to apply a strategy of developing economic and political co-operation in the CIS, that would have brought outstanding results to our country".

Movement "Ravnopravie" (Equality of rights) will strive for enhancing and expanding economic and cultural relations with the CIS member states and first of all with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

Party of Communists of Moldova will "safeguard Moldova's active participation in the integration processes in the CIS and European areas and within the international economic structures."

One can thus mention an extremely wide range of geopolitical options of our parties. The liberals and Christian democrats have spoken of the need to reconsider the membership of our country in the CIS, and the European and Euro-Atlantic integration are presented as the two alternatives to our CIS membership. The social democrats in the Parliament (SDAM) and those outside it (SDPM), do not see any contradiction in terms between our membership of the CIS and the EU. They remain extremely concerned with the neutrality of Moldova and in their programmes they pledge for joining NATO, although lately their visions has evolved substantially, and they have been talking of the need for closer co-operation with the North Atlantic Alliance. More to the left, the Democratic Party and the CPM do not even consider talking about an eventual joining of NATO but rather of a natural complementarity between the European Union and the CIS, while the "Ravnopravie" (Equality of rights) Movement simply ignores the united Europe.

II. Political management: between desiderata and feasible project

It seems that the communist leaders at the rule of the state are tempted to adopt a pragmatic behaviour, understanding that at present Moldova has no viable alternative to European integration. The ruling party has two wings: one busy with the administration of the state and the other - with disputing the decisions of the former. The division between the two is nuanced, it is more visible sometimes, at other times the same people pass easily from the administrative action, more or less responsible, to the rhetoric of dispute. This double doctrine and behaviour explain the virulent discourse of the current government. It is not by chance that the turn towards the European rhetoric is presented as premiere at national scale. The leaders of the anti-system party, integrally in opposition before the February 2001 elections, under pressure from the internal and regional configuration, have changed direction and have denied everything that was done before then on the issue of European integration. Declaring their commitment to the European option, the leaders of the CPM have been demolishing the institutions of the state, such as the local autonomy and the institution of prefect, tailored by the model and with the support of Europe. It is true that the more realistic wing in the party gains more ground, yet the communist leaders who follow the communist practices make use of the language of dispute, while the society has started to get used to this double message. The fact that the party of communists overall has not changed its line and has not made public its position on the issue of European integration is due to the hidden power and weight of the

opposing wing, as well as to the traditional obedience of the communists towards the old metropolis. The chair of the CPM, who is also president of the country, has never raised frankly before his party colleagues the need for re-orienting the programme of the party, probably in order to avoid the risk of damaging his image in the party circles but of breaking the unity of the party. As a result, the administration promotes an alternative policy, declared pro-European, which to a certain extent takes into account the domestic realities and in particular the rapport of forces on the continent, but which presupposes a visible autarchic touch, one of relying on local resources and the structures inherited from the Soviet period. Clearly, the 2002 initiative when the Head of State pushed for European integration, was a manifestation of the prevalence of the more realistic wing. Due to pressure from opposition parties and the society on the whole, the favourable international conditions and, apparently, their analysis, the spontaneous support by the communists of European integration will gain more ground. For the time being, we are witnessing an obvious paradox. While European integration becomes a real national idea for Moldova, enjoying the overwhelming support of the population, as has shown in all polls conducted recently, this idea seems to irremediably divide the ruling party. It could lead even to a split in the CPM, especially if the issue of European integration passes from declarations to practical politics, and especially if the leadership of the state faces the sacramental dilemma of the communists - either the EU or the CIS. The quicker Moldova advances on the way to European integration, the more the internal conflict in the CPM will aggravate and closer the day of final dispute between the moderate and the tougher wings will be. In the short term, this internal dispute will have a certain impact on managing the process of European integration, as apart from important state tasks, the current leadership will have to face a powerful current from inside the party, which will dispute the legitimacy of the European option.

The stake that the ruling party has put on denying the impact that the opposition parties had and might have is counter-productive to the process of European integration. Permanently facing the pro-European parties, and neglecting the initiatives of the opposition, marring their significance and maintaining in the centre of public debates many of the themes of the past, the communists have weakened the cohesion of the society in view of achieving the objective of European integration. By limiting the access of other parties to the state media with national coverage the ruling party has narrowed the social basis for the process of European integration. On the other hand, the chronic weakness of the opposition has reduced substantially the chances that its pro-European proposals be heard, understood and supported by the society. Other parties have newspapers with limited circulation and this has seriously undermined the media effect of their pro-European line. The opposition parties, with few exceptions, do not have special departments working on programmes and projects of European integration, and the issue is dealt with by their foreign policy experts or spokespersons. The parties' strategies of communication with the society, intended to generalise and permanentise the European option, are most often incoherent and improperly articulated. The level of preparation for the process of European integration must be measured by the agenda of debates and reflections proposed by the political parties on the issue of European integration. We would like to mention here the initiative of the Christian democrats to hold a referendum on the issue of joining the EU and NATO, the initiative of the Liberal Party to set up the Round Table with Permanent Status, the proposal by the participants to the Round Table, addressed to President Voronin, to set up a National Commission for drafting a new

strategy of European integration, the conferences organised by the Social-Liberal Party, the actions of the Alliance of Independents aimed at promoting democracy and local autonomy, the fostering of relations between the Moldovan political parties with European political parties.

The opposition parties are for the time being few, many competent specialists avoid joining their ranks, and those already in participate in groups holding rivalling interests. Thus, parties lack the necessary intellectual input for articulating a profound and detailed message. The need for every important party to work out an operational model of European integration is dictated by the imperative of good governance. The Liberal Party, for example, believes that we need "a new political thinking and practice, according to which safeguarding general well being may not be through of without the well being of every citizen". The model of society for which the democratic parties plead involves a series of policies and actions which have not been finalised to date. The opposition parties are fragmented, organisationally weak and lack the financial means to wage an intensive media offensive. As a result, they focus their efforts primarily in the sphere of immediate politics and of improving their current image in order to increase their electoral chances and are less concerned about developing concrete programmes and viable alternatives. They do not have political, economic and ideological programmes that would be complex, detailed and rigorously drafted for the neighbourhood with the EU, the pre-accession period, the negotiation stages and the accession to the EU.

III. Conclusions

1. Ensuing from the above is a need for an analysis of the compatibility of Moldovan parties and in particular of the ruling one with the political parties from the EU Member States. All political parties need to consider the following priority tasks: constitution of an European identity, drafting complex policies of European integration and of communicating with the society.
2. While the CPM lacks its own vision of the European option, it is now applying the visions of the opposition parties. Its leaders promote the European integration without having their own project, structured and coherent, and without an internal party consensus. The lack of CPM's own political project does not mobilise the ruling party and the society around the objective of European integration, despite the fact that the party further enjoys the support of the electorate. The irreversibility of European option of the communists remains open, as long as the current programme of the party is valid.
3. One can note an obvious gap between the programme provisions and the practical actions of parties, among their programmes, often old and anachronistic, and the pro-European declarations of the leaders of parties. To synchronise their message and actions, some parties will have to adjust their programmes to the new circumstances.
4. The right wing, centre-right and centre-left parties are aware of the importance of the objective of European integration for the future of our country and have proposed the measures that they think need to be taken. However, their political programmes are generally declarative and demand driven, they picture the European future too

abstractly, as a common good for the country, and the benefit/cost aspect is not presented enough. The fragility of the conceptual construction might create illusion among the population as to the complexity of the objective of European integration.

5. The political environment in Moldova remains divided over the European option, some parties opt for joining NATO and the EU and others for just the EU while a third group believes that Moldova could be a member both of the CIS and the EU. Other divisions among parties arise in relation to their position on our historical legacy and the civilisational path that we are to follow, the policy on private property, the foreign investments, the role of the state, the economic, social and cultural policies and other important problems. The systemic differences in approach have a negative impact on our national cohesion on our strategic objectives.

6. Under these circumstances, the political parties are to identify an acceptable method of reconciliation of interests, to agree on a minimum package of coherent policies in important fields and a national plan of actions, with a view to build wide national consensus which will help prepare the effective accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union.

Endless elections?

17 July 2003

More than one month has passed since the date of the general local elections, but it seems that they will never end. The runoff repeat voting for the election of mayors was held on 22 June and 6 July, but the wave of complaints against the results of the elections is growing further. For example, the results of the elections are still being disputed in three localities in the Gagauz region and in several localities in the districts Soroca and Ungheni. It has already become a phenomenon the fact that most often the courts rule in favour of the ruling party. The few complaints that have been made against irregularities committed by the ruling party have been rejected by the Moldovan justice. The third phenomenon is that the CP loses practically all elections as a result of repeat voting with almost a double difference as compared to the disputed results.

As a rule, the CP disputes the election results by invoking the irregularities that the OSCE Mission has been regularly detecting in Moldova starting 1994 and which the OSCE has deemed unable to have a significant impact on the final election results. These refer to the faulty compilation of voter rolls, the "family vote" that breaches the secrecy of the vote, and other minor offences of the kind.

It has been noted that the CP wins the cases in courts of appeal, after the courts responsible for the validation of mandates have ruled to the contrary. It happens though that the rulings of the courts of appeal in favour of the CP are denied by the voters, who, surprisingly, turn out in much larger numbers for the repeat voting and so double the difference in the number of votes received by the communist candidates and their opponents, with the former being the losers. There are two explanations for this phenomenon. First, the citizens protest against the invalidation of their votes and the harassment that those who win over the communists with a significant number of dozens or hundreds of votes are being subject to. Secondly, a month after the end of the electoral campaign, it has become clear for many voters that the promises of the government have been false as important increases in the price of energy and food stuff has occurred immediately after the elections instead of the promised improvement in the quality of life. Thus, within the repeat voting of 6 July, the communist candidates were defeated repeatedly in Costesti (Ialoveni district), Pohornicesti (Orhei district) and Cuhurestii de Jos (Floresti district).

Much sadder are things in the few cases when the results of the elections are being disputed by the opponents of the communists. In these cases, as a rule, the court of first instance pleads in favour of the opponents of communists but the latter later win in the court of appeals. This happened in the commune Rudi in Soroca district and commune Magurele in Ungheni district. The last case deserves special attention as it brings out the new practices in Moldova. The thing is that in Magurele the difference between the number of votes won by the winning communist candidate and his rival candidate was of three votes. The court of first instance ruled in favour of the non-communist plaintiff who had presented a number of evidence of serious violation of the electoral laws. First, the electoral officers in Magurele allowed four citizens, residents of another locality, to vote. Secondly, the polling station closed 10 minutes before the time provided for by the legislation, and four citizens were prevented from

exercising their voting rights. Thirdly, three elderly voters were deprived of the right to vote at home, despite their specific request to the members of the electoral bureau. Fourthly, it has been determined that by fault of the members of the electoral bureau who left their work place for a certain amount of time, the ballot of one voter was invalidated because it did not bear the control stamp. The same electoral officers let the son of the communist candidate to vote although he is not 18 yet. Obviously, with a difference of only three votes between the votes received by the two candidates, each of the four violations mentioned above could have influenced the results of the vote. Moreover, things got even worse as there were suspicions that the violations could have even be intended since two of the members of the electoral bureau are related to the winning communist candidate. Therefore, it was only natural for the court of first instance to rule in favour of the plaintiff. The fact that the court of appeal in Balti ruled out the ruling of the court of first instance provokes bewilderment and suspicion. All the more so if one compares the reasons for which the communist plaintiffs win when they complain with the ones mentioned in the Magurele case. The public opinion can only question the way in which the principle of uniform application of laws is being applied in Moldova and whether this is not by any chance what the communist government tried to achieve by reforming the judicial system. Also, another question might arise: what will happen to the electoral process in Moldova after the mandate of the current Central Electoral Commission expires and it is replaced by a new one, appointed by the current ruling party?

Changes on the Political Scene (Part I)

30 July 2003

On 19 July 2003, the Founding Congress of a new political party - the Alliance Moldova Noastra (Our Moldova) (AMN) took place. The event can be regarded as a highly salient one. The new party is made up of three parties, of comparable weight: the Social Democratic Alliance (SDA), the Alliance of Independents (AI) and the Liberal Party (LP). These were later joined by the low profile People's Democratic Party (PDP). For reasons of convenience of registration with the Justice Ministry and political succession, the AMN has been declared the political successor of the SDA. As a result of the merger, at present there are 22 registered political parties in Moldova.

1. Essential characteristics of the AMN

The founding parties of the AMN have been part of the Electoral Bloc Social Liberal Alliance Moldova Noastra (Our Moldova), that was created on the eve of the 25 May 2003 local elections. The bloc performed fairly well in the recent elections and received about 20% of the votes, which made it the most important opposition force. The leaders of the party claim to have 100,000 members, which is 5 to 6 times as much as the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM) and the People's Christian Democratic Party (PCDP), until recently considered the main opposition force in Moldova.

AMN proclaimed itself a "party of citizens" and has pledged for the harmonisation of inter-ethnic relations in Moldova. In addition, the AMN has claimed it will promote social policies and "represent the interests of the middle class in formation". This latter option draws upon the social-liberal doctrine to which the AMN has adhered, willing to "combine the principle of individual freedom with that of social solidarity, the minimal role of the state and its responsibility for the unconditioned and equal respect for the law". The major political issue currently faced by Moldova, the Transnistrian conflict, the AMN intends to resolve through the internationalisation of the conflict resolution efforts. In the foreign policy field, the AMN agenda is topped by the European integration of Moldova. This task, in the view of AMN, may be accomplished "through the declared and clearly demonstrated support of Romania, with whom, in the context of the European community, we will share a common European historic, economic, cultural and language space".

2. Factors that have determined the foundation of the AMN

There is a series of factors that have determined the founding of the AMN. First, the main constituent parties and its leaders have been in an overt conflict with the authorities and the ruling party. None of these parties had the capacity to cope with that conflict on its own. Secondly, the merge is a logical follow up of the events that started with the foundation of the Democratic Forum of Moldova in May 2001 following the CPM absolute victory in the 2001 parliamentary elections. These were succeeded by a number of important mergers that reduced the number of registered

parties from 31 to 25. Hence, the foundation of AMN was to be expected after the relative success that it registered in the May 2003 elections.

This has made the new party rather attractive both for the potential new members and for the voters who are looking for a strong reform-driven party to invest their hopes. Likewise, the foundation of the AMN could attract potential sponsors from the business environment who have become disillusioned with the current government's economic policies. Secondly, the AMN name and symbols seem to have been properly chosen and, most importantly, they are already familiar to the voters. Interestingly, in the neighbouring countries, the most important opposition formations or those affiliated with the government bear in their names the name of the country, which seems to be popular with the voters, as for example "Îàà Óêðàèà" (Our Ukraine), "Åäèàÿ Ðññèÿ" (United Russia). Thirdly, the AMN has been created after the potential of the Moldovan political forces has been clearly elucidated. It has thus become clear that in the upcoming parliamentary campaign, which is to start in one year and a half, about four political forces will be able to compete seriously. These are, in the conventional left-right order, the CPM, the Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM), the AMN and the PCDP. Another serious competitor in those elections could be the recent electoral bloc between the Social Democratic Party and the Social Liberal Party. The remaining 15 registered parties will be non-significant allies of these strong contestants or they will merely harness votes for the parties that will pass the 6% threshold.

From this perspective, the positioning of the AMN, the most powerful opposition force, at the centre of the political spectrum increases its chances to participate in the future coalition government, be it centre-left or centre-right. That such positioning is advantageous has been proved by the Movement for a Democratic and Prosperous Moldova in the aftermath of the 1998 parliamentary elections. Back then, the Movement held the key position in the talks on setting up the parliamentary majority with the right-wing parties, on the one hand, and the CPM, on the other hand. Notably, the current electoral weight of the AMN is almost similar to the one held by the Movement in 1998.

Another important factor for the future electoral projects of the AMN is that the rating of the current ruling party has stepped into a phase of decline. This has clearly shown in the recent local elections. Despite the official reports of "impetuous economic growth", independent experts have insisted on an eventual cumulating effect of the negative factors in the economy of the country, such as the increase in prices on energy and foodstuffs. All these factors have exacerbated the frustration of the entire local and central state administration caused by endless reforms, revisions of previous reforms, new conceptions and strategies in the domestic and foreign policy, of which none can possibly be carried out fully. Importantly, these assumptions have been confirmed by the former presidential adviser Victor Doras, who contributed greatly to the CPM victory in 2001 and who knows in minute detail the state of the art in various fields of major importance for the development of the country. Thus, the prospect of the CPM rating shrinking to levels attested elsewhere in the CIS area (20 to 30 percent in Russia and Ukraine) is the most probable. Differently put, on the eve of the 2005 parliamentary elections, the CPM rating might be equal to that of the AMN. Of course, this sort of estimations is very approximate. Nonetheless, it was the CPM leader himself, Vladimir Voronin, who said immediately after the CPM victory

in 2001 that he was aware of the fact that an important share of the electorate had supported the CPM largely out of a feeling of protest against the previous governments. It is the current government itself that might become the main object of discontent of the protesting voters in future elections. One can thus assume that most of the discontent ones will opt for the parties at the centre of the political spectrum, the DPM and the AMN. Surely, after the ceremonial "putting into practice the vertical axis of power" during the last CPM plenary meeting, one can expect it to become the principal resource that the CPM will use to cling to power.

European Integration - A Strategic Objective?

7 August 2003

On 31 July 2003, The Parliament held the closing meeting of the 2003 spring-summer session, which heard reports by President Voronin, Prime Minister Tarlev and Speaker Ostapciuc. The speech of President Voronin was called by the official press as a programmatic one that fixed new benchmarks for the fulfilment of Moldova's major objective - integration into the European Union. The official press also expressed bewilderment at the fact that the proposals that the president made in his speech have not been debated or commented upon. Indeed, the speech of the president and his proposals are of positive significance and deserve special attention. Thus, Voronin determined the intermediary task for Moldova to become EU associate by 2007. Achieving this task requires an understanding between all Moldova's political forces and coherence of action.

However, due to the permanent conflict with the majority faction, both opposition factions, that of the People's Christian Democratic Party and that of the Social Democratic Alliance, boycotted the closing meeting of the Parliament to which the president delivered his speech. Anyway, this fact cannot underestimate an eventual co-operation between the ruling party and the opposition towards achieving the objective set by the president, because in both opposition factions' political programmes European integration features as Moldova's strategic objective. On the other hand, the absence of the opposition factions from the parliament room was a symbolic one if one observes that the last plenary meeting of the parliament was not different from a gathering of the ruling party. It is this very fact that makes things especially significant.

The thing is that one month ago, during the last plenary meeting of the ruling party, Vladimir Voronin, in his capacity of Chair of the Communist Party, addressed literally the same audience. In his speech back then, Voronin said that "the parliamentary activity is just another, subordinated part of the overall activity of the party. This is the way things should be. This is the right way. If this rule is breached, the chaos and lack of responsibility will be inevitable, leading to apolitism and self-destruction".

This statement by President Voronin should be a very confusing one for the members of the ruling Communist Party who are also members of parliament. The appeal of the Head of State Voronin to take efforts to integrate Moldova into the EU are in flagrant contradiction with the appeal of the Chair of the Communist Party Voronin. The thing is that the political manifesto of the party, adopted in April 2001, soon after the communists' absolute victory in the 2001 elections, clearly provides for Moldova's integration into the Russia-Belarus Union and the foundation of a federation of the former Soviet republics.

Moreover, in his last speech to the Parliament, President Voronin stressed that "if we think of ourselves as politicians, if we are ready to be accountable to our people for every word we say, then, I believe it is time to proceed to concrete actions". We would like to remind that as chairman of the party, at the plenary meeting of the party in May last year, which, as we have seen, was to subordinate the parliamentary

activity of the majority faction, Voronin stated that it would be necessary to change the manifesto and modernise the party. To date, none of this has been done.

Nonetheless, President Voronin proposed in his last speech new changes, which he called revolutionary and intended to modernise Moldova. In this sense, he asked himself and his party colleagues whether there was an alternative to Moldova's integration into the EU: "Now that the global processes of integration have transcended the borders of the European Union, can our country stay hostage to some indigenous particularisms, can we claim a historic path different from the one that all modern states pursue? Let us not make illusions! There is no alternative!". Here it is worth remembering that the sole peculiarity of Moldova is that the party that rules it had the ambition, two years ago, to include in its political programme the strategic objective of building communism. Moreover, during the party congress that approved the said programme, one insisted on the conviction that Moldova would become the epicentre of the rebirth of the international communist movement. Now that we know that there is no alternative to integration into the EU, and the party decisions have priority and must be applied by the institutions of the state, then, to make actions coherent, it would be logical to change the programme of the party so that it, just like the programmes of the opposition parties, provides expressly for the strategic objective of European integration. When such a change is made, appeals such as the one to co-operation between the ruling party and the opposition will be much more credible.

If one tries to assess the degree to which actions match words, as the president has urged us to, then we would notice that at the recent plenary meeting of the ruling party, in a solemn atmosphere, the doctrine of "vertical axis of power" has been launched. One knows that authoritarian regimes tend to embrace this sort of doctrine. None of the EU Member States or future EU members is concerned with enforcing this doctrine. How, then, can the ruling party inspire credibility when it calls for implementing the EU democratic standards if the consequences of the "vertical axis of power" doctrine are the undermining of the independence of the judicial system and of the integrity of the electoral process, as has been shown in the OSCE Election Observation reports? Similarly, how can the Communist Party be credible if still disputes the victory of its ally from the Centre Left Union, the Party of Socialists, in the mayor elections in two Gagauz localities?

Speaking of the remarkable economic and social achievements, which should bring us closer to the EU, the representatives of the ruling party do avoid to explain why, for the third consecutive year, Moldova's indicator of human development is shrinking, bringing us further apart from the EU. The reason may be that while speaking of the need to implement the economic standards of the EU, the ruling party continues to harass foreign investors and undermine the autonomous activity of agencies that regulate the energy price policy. It is well known that all this has a negative impact on our relations with the international financial bodies as well as the EU donor states. But, at a closer look, one notes that things are the way they are because the political programme of the Communist Party says so, and, as the last plenary meeting of the party has shown, it has priority.

Thus, it is obvious that before proposing to the society new objectives the leaders of the ruling party should understand one simple thing - they should bring their own political programme in line with the objectives set forth by the president in his last speech.

1. Sources of inspiration

On August 6, Transdnistrian leaders made public their own draft Constitution for the prospective federation. In fact, it has nothing to do with establishing a federation, but rather with establishing a union of independent states, i.e. confederation, or as they put it "contractual federation". What is annoying is the fact that the subjects' right to secession is tackled right at the beginning of the document under the transitory provisions.

As for the content, at least two sources of inspiration are traceable, namely Treaty on the establishment of the Russia-Belarus common state and Constitutional Charter of the Serbia and Montenegro Union States. At least a couple of premises for the establishment of Serbia - Montenegro and Russia - Belarus common states could be identified, which derive directly from those countries' interests. For instance, the goal of Serbia and Montenegro is to join EU in a common effort, fact reflected in Article 3 of the Constitutional Charter. To be accepted in EU those two countries have to conform to the requirement of preserving the union state. As for Russia-Belarus, under Article 6 of the Treaty the union subjects are to remain full rights UN members. The Union is established merely for economic reasons. Therefore, a would-be separation of subjects in the case of Serbia and Montenegro is tackled in one of the last chapters, whereas in the case of Russia - Belarus it is not tackled at all. Needless to say, de facto the said Union does not exist, although the Treaty was signed four years ago.

Given this it would be interesting to reflect a little on the reasons for establishing a union between the Republic of Moldova and Transdnistria, from the standpoint of the breakaway region. On the one hand, Transdnistrian region has no status whatsoever. On the other, it is also true that by signing the Memorandum in 1997 Moldova agreed in principle on establishing a joint state formed by two equal rights subjects. The Memorandum entitles Transdnistria to have a saying in the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova in as far as its interests are concerned. From this perspective the mere fact that Republic of Moldova set EU integration as one of its strategic goals, whereas Transdnistria declares itself a "Russian land", already poses a threat for the existence of the would-be "joint state". Nevertheless, the guarantor countries Russia, Ukraine and OSCE signed the Memorandum. Furthermore, Republic of Moldova and Russia signed the Basic Treaty providing that Republic of Moldova adhere to "peaceful resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict, whereas Russia will serve as a mediator and guarantor". Considering that Russia is Moldova's main creditor and trading partner, the latter attaches great importance to the official documents signed between the two countries. As a matter of fact, Vladimir Putin stated during his meeting in February with Vladimir Voronin that he would plead for "granting Transdnistrian region a clearly guaranteed status".

2. Goals pursued

This being said, the question is how far may the Transdnistrian leaders want to go within the framework of the agreements signed by the Republic of Moldova and principle guarantor country. Firstly, as it was already mentioned breakaway leaders pursue the idea of secession of the two equal subjects - "right to secession is granted to any subject whenever one of the subjects makes public its intent or takes actions in view of renouncing to sovereignty and independence". In other words, if Transdnistrian leaders who are citizens of Russia declared as they used to, that Transdnistria is a "Russian land", then they would be entitled to legally hold a referendum, whose results would have a legal effect under the Constitution they have proposed. Thus, the prospective "contractual federation" is intended first and foremost to grant de jure equal rights to both federation subjects, so that in the future they might part legally.

Another core principle of the document developed by Tiraspol is that the subjects' rights have a supremacy over the federation's right in matters of mutual interest. Obviously, they made sure to list under mutual interest: economy, currency, monetary issues, customs, communications, law enforcement, etc. Clearly, what Tiraspol is really looking after is to preserve control over customs and Eastern border of Moldova; to change the army name into "people's guard" and to keep it under its control; to gain the right to issue a certain quota of the "joint state" currency (fact not even stipulated in the draft EU Constitution, instead, Belarus does claim to issue currency equivalent to its GDP quota in the Russia-Belarus Union); to keep control over law enforcement forces; and to hold any kinds of referenda and elections separately, so as to be able to manipulate their outcomes.

Generally speaking, it seems that Transdnistrian leaders intended to push federalization to its absurd. An illustration of this is the procedure developed for the adoption of normative acts by the Federal Parliament. The two chambers of the Parliament are to consist not of political parties' factions, but rather of two factions including deputies elected on the soil of the two federation subjects. To be adopted, legal acts are to be voted by the majority in each of the two territorial factions. Another question then rises, what's the use of a Lower Chamber elected according to the numerical criteria (1 deputy representing 25,000 citizens), if it does not affect in any way the voting outcome (Moldova's electorate is about 2,400,000 and Transdnestrian - 700,000). Furthermore, why do we need to spend public funds for a federal parliament consisting of two factions formed based on the territorial principle, if it may be replaced by the Parliaments of each of the subjects who would examine draft laws developed by a legislative center of the joint state?

There are a number of other curiosities in Tiraspol's draft, but what really matters is that Tiraspol seeks to obstruct the adoption of a new Constitution in line with OSCE draft, thwarting thus the intentions of international organizations, i.e. US and EU, to settle the conflict by the end of the year.

3. Time and electoral factors

What are the practical reasons for such kind of behavior displayed by Transdnistrian leaders? Firstly, the principle guarantor, Russia, is foregoing an electoral campaign for State Duma elections in December and then presidential elections in March 2004. Analysts pointed three key issues political debates would center around: denigrating oligarchs, fighting corruption in law enforcement forces, and patriotic and nostalgic citizens' feelings. Having said that, it is very unlikely that Russian authorities would dare to pressure Transdnistrian breakaway regime, given that it pursues the same agenda, exploiting the nostalgic feelings of Russian speaking citizens. As usual, nationalistic Russian political elite would resort to patriotic and expansionist rhetoric. An illustration of this is the recent visit in Abkhazia of the Chair of the State Duma Committee for Foreign Relations, Dmitrii Rogozin. He expressed his support to the leaders of the breakaway region and criticism towards Georgia. The fact is that currently the Russian "imperial reflexes" could be displayed only in such countries as Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

It is very unlikely that EU or US would undertake any uncoordinated actions towards settling Transdnistrian conflict or even coercive measures against Transdnistria, given that Russian political elite openly promotes Transdnistrian interests. Russian representatives expressed on several occasions their disagreements with such initiatives of OSCE (Netherlands initiative), US or EU (ban for Transdnistrian leaders to enter EU or USA). Their standpoint was made quite clear - Russian interests in Transdnistria should be taken into account.

Given this, domestic observers believe that by making public their draft Constitution Transdnistrian leaders were in fact seeking to provoke a negative reaction of the Moldovan authorities, so as to blame Chisinau, as it usually happens, for rejecting Tiraspol's draft without having developed its own at least for the sake of comparison. The end goal appears to be to justify the obstruction of the joint constitutional commission's activity. Transdnistrian authorities already stated that it might take one year to develop the federative Constitution, consequently the conflict wouldn't be settled by the end of the year as OSCE and US insisted on. Actions have already been taken to justify a possible stay of the Russian troops on the soil of the Republic of Moldova after the deadline set for their withdrawal at the Porto OSCE Summit. The situation is escalated on purpose so as to infer that only Russia is able to settle. And all these efforts only to gain time and discourage EU and US from getting involved more actively in the resolution of the conflict.

The second reasoning behind the obstruction of the resolution process is to push the negotiation close to the launch of electoral campaign for Moldovan parliamentary elections due to start in December 2004. In the past Transdnistrian leaders succeeded in getting huge benefits and concessions from the Moldovan side exactly on the eve and immediately after elections. This might be explained by the competition among the electoral contestants in settling the conflict. This was the case in 1996 when on the eve of elections former President Mircea Snegur granted the customs seals of the Republic of Moldova to Transdnistria and allowed its foreign trade. Also, Petru Lucinski who succeeded to the Presidential seat signed on May 8, 1997 the famous Memorandum on establishing a joint state by two equal subjects. The incumbent President, Vladimir Voronin, also promised during 2001 electoral campaign that his

party would rapidly settle the conflict. In this respect on May 16, 2001 he signed together with the Transdnistrian leader a series of documents reconfirming the provisions of the 1997 Memorandum. However, several months later he realized that Tiraspol leaders had no intention whatsoever to give up on Transdnistria's status as an independent state, which might form a confederation with the Republic of Moldova for the sole reason of legitimizing and breaking apart afterwards. It was back then that Transdnistrian leaders were denied the new customs seals, and the "economic blockade" as they like to put it began.

Apparently the upcoming electoral campaign wouldn't be an exception. Leaders of the major opposition party, Alliance "Our Moldova", have already voiced their disagreement with the actions undertaken by the Communist Party in settling Transdnistrian conflict. They established a liaison with Transdnistrian leaders and implied that the conflict might be resolved once the Communist Party gets defeated in the parliamentary elections. This fact again allows Transdnistrian side some room for maneuvers.

In a related note, last year during the electoral campaign for the election of Gagauz-Yeri Governor, Gheorghe Tabunshik, candidate endorsed by the Communist Party, promised to plead for the autonomy to become a subject of the Moldovan federation. However, after elections both Tabunshik and the Communist Party suggested that granting Gagauz-Yeri the status of federation subject was no longer appropriate. It sufficed just to amend the Constitution in order to legalize the status and rights it enjoyed. Nevertheless, speculations on federalization played their role. Currently, the majority of deputies in Gagauz-Yeri Assembly demand the status of federation subject for the autonomy. It is not a coincidence that these claims come on the eve of the electoral campaign for elections in Peoples' Assembly of Gagauz-Yeri. Indeed the candidates resorting to pro-federalization rhetoric would have higher chances to win the race. Consequently Chisinau authorities might end up with a strong pro-federation movement in Gagauz-Yeri contesting the concept of "asymmetric federation" founded by two subjects, which President Voronin is promoting.

4. Opportunities and resources

The confrontation between Chisinau and Tiraspol is ongoing it only varies in its intensity. In the last two years the propagandistic war coupled by economic and trade measures has reached its climax. In this respect it would be interesting to consider how the parties exploit the new opportunities and what are their resources.

For instance Chisinau's resources have been limited, however the favorable international conjuncture, i.e. NATO and EU extension, has brought it some benefits, namely efforts to settle Transdnistrian conflict were put under international control. It so happens that NATO and EU interests to secure the borders with and eliminate the conflicts from the neighborhood regions coincide with a particular interest of the Republic of Moldova.

Tiraspol reacted in an adequate manner. Transdnistrian leaders proceeded to the privatization of the public property so that the economic interests of the regional separatist elite wouldn't be affected upon an eventual federalization. Also, as usual, they exploited "Slavic brotherhood" motives so as to win the support of Russia and Ukraine. That's because there are two main factors that ensured Transdnistria's existence: a) Russian troops and ammunition dislocated in the region; b) Ukraine's tacit consent to the illegal export of Transdnistrian goods through its territory.

Under the resolution of the Istanbul OSCE Summit, Russian troops and munitions had to be withdrawn from Transdnistria by the end of 2002. Transdnistrian authorities created the necessary conditions for Russian diplomacy to justify the impossibility of withdrawing the munitions. A new deadline was set during the Porto Summit, which most likely wouldn't be met again. During the 8 months of the year only 1/3 of the munitions have been withdrawn. Transdnistrian side precludes the withdrawal of munitions on the grounds that Russia failed to comply with the financial compensation arrangements agreed upon. This situation resembles another one, the document signed by the Republic of Moldova and Russia in 1994 providing for the synchronization of munitions withdrawal with granting a legal status to Transdnistria. As Transdnistria wished to be an independent state, whereas Russia didn't want to withdraw its munitions nothing was solved after all. Nowadays, Russia is still interested to keep its military presence in the region as is Transdnistrian administration.

As for the second reason that ensured Transdnistria's existence, i.e. Ukraine, it underwent some changes. Through the mediation efforts of the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, EU managed to convince Ukraine to secure its borders with the Republic of Moldova and to allow only the exports of goods bearing the new Moldovan customs seals. In May Customs Departments of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine signed an agreement in this respect. Noteworthy, two years ago President Leonid Kucima refused such an agreement, although his Moldovan counterpart insisted on it. Back then Leonid Kucima, explained his refusal by the fact that the revenues of some Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea come from Transdnistrian exports and that it is paramount to protect their interests. In response, President Voronin stated in public that he would endorse the Communist Party of Ukraine in the parliamentary elections of March 2002.

At the moment Ukraine's good relations with EU seem to prevail and EU arguments seem more convincing. Allegedly, Kucima's new perspective on Ukraine's best interests determined Moldovan President to award him "Order of the Republic", the highest decoration of the Republic of Moldova, on his 65 anniversary. This allegation comes from the fact that last year Russian President, Vladimir Putin received from Moldovan President, Vladimir Voronin, only a crystal crocodile for his 50th anniversary, celebrated in Chisinau. Afterall, may be Javier Solana, who is due to visit Moldova in autumn, is the one to deserve the "Order of the Republic", instead or together with Leonid Kucima?

To adequately respond to the "economic and customs blockade" imposed on Transdnistria (as Ukraine recognizes only Moldovan Customs seals), Transdnistrian leader, Igor Smirnov, decreed a 100% tax on the import of Moldovan goods. At the same time he introduced a free trade agreement and preferential trade regime with

Ukraine so as to cover the needs of the local market. Moldovan authorities mocked those actions and ridiculed Smirnov on the grounds he cannot distinguish between a free trade agreement and preferential trade. Apparently Smirnov holds a PhD in economics at one of the most prestigious Universities, the Moscow one. He might have received it for political rather than scientific reasons, still he should understand what a "balance of trade" is and what are the resources needed to cover the deficit. It seems that Russia would adequately recompense Transdnistria for the munitions already withdrawn from the region. Now it's up to Kucima to decide what does he prefer "Order of the Republic of Moldova" or a free trade agreement with Transdnistria? That is the more important as the presidential election in Ukraine are scheduled for October 2004.

Besides the support they are enjoying, Transdnistrian leaders do not cease to use new opportunities. Apparently they have identified a new way of strengthening their positions. For instance up till now Tiraspol avoided to synchronize with Chisinau certain events, like elections, referenda and the like. However, recently Transdnistrian leaders announced they would hold a census in the region simultaneously with that in Moldova. How come?

There is only one reasonable explanation to this. Transdnistrian leaders justified the separation from the Republic of Moldova by "exercising Transdnistrian people's right to self-determination". Obviously, nobody took it seriously. During the 1989 census citizens residing in Transdnistria identified themselves as Moldovans, Ukrainians, Russians, etc. It then means that the genesis of the "Transdnistrian people" was completed only in one year, by 1990, when they declared their separation from Moldova. Nowadays, after 13 years of the regime existence, Transdnistrian leaders administer all the necessary tools to manipulate public opinion so as to determine citizens to identify themselves as Transdnistrians, distinct from Moldovans, Russians, Ukrainians, etc. residing on the opposite bank of Dniester river. Synchronization of the census on both banks of the Dniester river is intended to confer the event a greater legitimacy. This might be regarded as an important step towards implementing the provisions of the Transdnistrian draft Constitution of the federative state related to the secession right, so as to achieve the principle of "people's right to self-determination". While Transdnistrian leaders find all kinds of justifications and resources in order to keep afloat, Moldovan authorities miss real opportunities to make the reunification of the country attractive to Transdnistrian residents, especially from an economic point of view. Transdnistrian propaganda has already spotted the economic problems Republic of Moldova is facing, especially given its worsening relations with IMF and World Bank. This might be a very serious argument in the propaganda war of convincing Transdnistrian citizens that reunification with Moldova will bring no good, except for worsening their financial situation.

Ideological inconsistency

19 August 2003

During the vacation period Tiraspol was mainly the one to wage the informal war with Chisinau. Tiraspol continues to employ the same methods, however with some minor innovations. One of the old methods employed are the appeals for support to various representatives of Russian elite. Although its effectiveness should not be underestimated. For instance, it is believed that Tiraspol won the 1992 conflict with Chisinau mainly due to the informational support of the Russian media, including the democratic and reformist one. For years Tiraspol managed to secure an open support of a considerable part of the Russian political elite in State Duma that shares revanchist and xenophobic ideals. However the most significant support to Tiraspol has come from the executive power in Russia, that secured protection in various fields and enabled economic development of the region, while entrapping Chisinau and decoying it in all kinds of "vicious circles". Russian intelligentsia as well as religious elite has played a role on this matter. To cite just the numerous scientific and religious awards that the separatist leader Igor Smirnov received, among others from the Patriarch Alexei II himself. All those awards were granted in appreciation of the "patriotic" efforts undertaken to establish a breakaway regime on the "Russian land" of Transdnistria.

None of the previous governing of the Republic of Moldova has had a chance of winning Russia's support in settling the Transdnistrian crisis, even though some of them enjoyed good relations with Russian political elite. One of the parties enjoying a real support in Moldova, the Communist Party, has had a standout approach towards the settlement of the Transdnistrian conflict. It may be reduced to the pledge to contribute to rebuilding Soviet Union and within its framework settle Transdnistrian conflict. To this end the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova adhered to and is still a member of the Union of Communist Parties - Communist Party of the Soviet Union (UCP-CPSS). In short the expectations of the Moldovan Communists were as follows: Communist and internationalist ideas of the former URSS would prevail over revanchist and nationalist ideas of the new elite.

In this respect, as Transdnistrian leaders' intentions to be "the last bastion of the soviet type Communism" were in line with statutory goals of the Communist Party of Moldova, the latter sought to justify the breakaway regime and engaged in criticizing previous governments' efforts to settle the conflict.

The way political landscape evolved in 10 years since the breakup of the URSS had slightly changed the Communist Party ideology. If we are to consider the quality of the party press, then from a theoretical and ideological point of view, the Communist Party hasn't evolved too far from the pro-Communist electronic publication "Bumbarash". From a practical point of view, the Communist Party didn't find anything better than to reiterate in its political program adopted at the April 2001 Congress (immediately after their victory in parliamentary elections) the same pledge to build the communist society in line with the Marxist-Leninist ideology and to rebuild URSS via the UCP-CPSS. It should be mentioned also that at that time the "destruction of the socialist motherland" was much deplored.

On the other hand, pragmatic leaders from Transdnistria changed the justification for their separatism a couple of times, i.e. from the "bastion of the soviet communism", to "promoter of Russia's interests in the Balkans", and finally to the more pragmatic reasons - their own economic interests. Privatization of the public patrimony has become a major tool in safeguarding those interests.

Having said that, it comes as no surprise that the impetuous collaboration between the Communist governing and breakaway regime lasted just a couple of months after the communist victory in February elections. It was followed by a tough and precarious confrontation lasting to this day. Consequently, Communist authorities had to revise their priorities. In his speech made on the 10th anniversary of Republic of Moldova, August 27, 2001, President Voronin stated that consolidating the independence of the Moldovan state was a top priority, forgetting, thus, about the program of his own party. One year later, Republic of Moldova integration into another Union than the soviet one, namely European Union, has become a priority. One could only wonder about such an impressive metamorphosis. Nonetheless, credibility has become an issue.

Indeed, Transdnistria has undergone some spectacular transformations. One is for sure, it remained "Russia's trustworthy partner" and promoter of Russia's interests, thus justifying its sole existence. No wonder the ideological babble vanished once the real interests of the new Moldovan Communist authorities and old Transdnistrian administration clashed.

And here comes the innovative methods employed by the Transdnistrian leaders. Currently they are exerting an influence over Moldovan authorities by pulling the strings in Moscow, i.e. UCP-CPSS. Recently the official Transdnistrian press has published the appeal of the Plenary Council of the UCP-CPSS entitled "Let's Join Our Efforts to Revive Our Motherland". Authors of the document call the governments, Communist parties and movements in the former URSS republics to recognize Transdnistria' independence that is "a trustworthy ally of Russia and an active promoter of rebuilding URSS", but which currently undergoes genocide. At least formally, the appeal is addressed among others to the governing party of the Republic of Moldova. According to the UCP-CPSS, USA poses a great threat to Transdnistria as it intends to settle the conflict by force.

Of course the appeal as well as the UCP-CPSS itself may be ignored. After all, what can we expect from an organization headed by one of the ideologists of the August 1991 putsch, namely Oleg Shenin, Chair of the Council Steering Committee. This Shenin is a rather dubious character. An illustration of this are his numerous comments on Russia's enemies such as: "we do understand what fascism, religious fundamentalism, and Islamic fundamentalism is, but what we fail to understand is what Zionism is?!"

No wonder that characters like this support Transdnistria. Liberal Jirinovski and others of the like, is another sample. At any rate, it is rather annoying that such an organization made up of "principled Communists" prefers to support a breakaway and illegal regime as Transdnistria is, which on top of everything pleads for the land privatization (!), rather than a democratically elected Moldovan communist regime, which publicly opposes land privatization. There is only one reasonable explanation -

ideology is nothing but a "trap for stupids" for Russian Communists, what really matters for them, as well as for other elite circles, is "the reunification of Russian territories".

The only issue here is whether it should come as a surprise that after all Moldovan governing party is still a member of the UCP-CPSS! And this especially after the Moldovan communist leaders named EU integration as a top priority, or after they condemned anti-Semitism.

One may only wonder how the representatives of the Moldovan Communist Party would feel at the UCP-CPSS reunions, especially as they are inaugurated by the anthem of the URSS whose lyrics was written by the "leading intellectual" - Serghei Mihalkov. The thing is that recently the declaration of the Russian writers headed by Serghei Mihalkov was published in Transdnistria, condemning Voronin's regime and acclaiming the regime of Igor Smirnov "laureate of Sholohov award". This is another evidence to the effect that for Russian intelligentsia, which may serve any regime in order to contribute to the greatness of their Motherland, what happened in Transdnistria, Chechnya, Abkhazia, and the like, and most importantly why it happened is of little or no relevance at all. What really matters for them is that in the said regions Russia might show off its greatness, regardless of the methods employed. If the intelligentsia was to inquire on the details of the 1992 provocation at the Bender Police Station, then Dostoevski's "Demons" would seem mere dilettantes when compared to those who contrived "complicity through the bloodshed" in order to justify later on the existence of the breakaway regime. The celebrations of the 13th anniversary of the Transdnistrian regime on September 2, would be another occasion for them to invoke the bloodshed.

For the sake of comparison, it is worth mentioning that although nothing provoked the operation "of reinforcing constitutional order" in Chechnya back in 1995, on the contrary it succeeded in taking the breakaway regime by surprise, Russian elite refrained from condemning it. Needless to say it happened after the Bender tragedy and after Moldovan authorities had been condemned for "reinforcing constitutional order". This is another example of Russian elite's principledness. It would be unfair to allege that Russian elite is made up only of the said characters, it also includes Serghei Kovaliov, Elena Bonner, and the like. Unfortunately, though, Moldovan communist authorities share a different ideology from them.

Negative trend in the electoral process

25 August 2003

In mid-August the final report of the OSCE observation mission, *Report on Local Elections in Moldova*, was posted on the its official website. The report was accompanied by a note, entitled "Negative trend observed during Moldova's local elections must be reversed". This negative trend observed in the electoral process has been a source of concern for OSCE Observation Mission, especially given considerable progress made in the previous elections. Steven Wagenseil, Deputy Director of OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights called on Moldovan authorities to undertake every effort to correct the negative trend.

On the one hand, the report notes that the administration of the elections, the legal framework and voting procedures, as well as the activity of the Central Electoral Commission and election officials at all the levels were generally in accordance with OSCE commitments. However, those achievements had been shadowed by the abusive behavior displayed by the authorities.

The report identifies a number of shortcomings in the conduct of elections, such as heavily biased and distorted reporting by the state media, interference by the authorities in the election process by arresting or threatening to arrest opposition candidates, as well as misuse of public resources for campaign purposes. This refers also to the electoral staff of the Chisinau Mayor, Serafim Urechean, the main opposition candidate.

Experts point that the integrity of the electoral process was undermined by the latest amendments to the Law on Political Parties imposing rather exaggerated requirements for the party registration. The amendments also infringe on data protection, as they require for provision of comprehensive personal data for each party member. Another source of concern has been the citizens' lack of confidence in courts and other institutions, the relatively low number of appeals being a relevant indication in this respect. In general the complaints mainly focussed on allegation of misuse of public resources for campaign purposes or on obstruction of opposition campaigning. This mainly refers to the overzealous enforcement of public security by police. OSCE report also reports on payment of bonuses to certain categories of population on certain occasions. Those practices should be forbidden as they disadvantage opposition candidates, which cannot afford to employ them. The report also outlines the case of the National House of Social Insurance that distributed humanitarian food aid, which reportedly included Communist Party campaign material. However the surprise of the recent campaign was that the Communist Party, which had violated the most legal provisions and largely engaged in electoral corruption, filled the greatest number of complaints. They are probably the only ones to trust the Moldovan judiciary.

Although the OSCE report covers extensively the positive and negative aspects of the electoral process, it is worth considering in detail the recommendations offered for consideration of Moldovan authorities in order to remedy the negative trend observed during the last elections. Those refer in particular to the following: CEC should be authorized to impose administrative sanctions for non-compliance with its orders or

decisions; entire system of voter registration should be revised. It is recommended to create a Civil Register, a data base accessible to all electoral bodies for them to be able to correctly compile voter lists. In the previous elections the number of voters included in supplementary voter lists was up to 10%. However in the recent local elections 7.4% of the voters were included in the supplementary lists in the first round, and 4.9% in the second - a conclusive indication to the fact that things were not changing for the better.

A special attention was given in the OSCE report to mass media coverage of elections. The recommendations include among others: making the free air time more ample; broadcasters should be encouraged to provide contestants with equitable debate conditions for the voters to decide on their own which of the contestants are more competent.

In addition broadcasters should not provide members of the government who are also candidates with extensive media coverage during news programs. The latter should provide neutral and impartial election coverage, whereas matters directly or indirectly related to elections should be debated during shows specifically assigned to it. Furthermore, the public should be informed if a message is a paid political advertisement.

As for campaign finance, it was also covered in the report. It was recommended to impose sanctions in case of non-compliance with the law, as well as to have in place audit and control mechanisms.

In conclusion, one may assume that both representatives of the governing party as well as opposition parties are very much familiar with the flaws of the Republic of Moldova electoral system. Civic organizations of Moldova working in the field of elections have repeatedly raised the shortcomings mentioned in the OSCE report. The fact is that numerous parties, which stayed in power exploited the shortcomings to their own advantage. This is the only reasonable explanation for the total lack of sanctions, such as suspension of the candidate registration, for the repeated violation of the law. And this because, parties in power had enjoyed greater opportunities to violate the law and to avoid sanctions. This is especially true with regard to the incumbent ruling party, which in the two and a half years of its rule has been constantly advocating for improving Moldova's image abroad, while itself bringing the greatest detriment to the image of the country through its actions, especially as far as elections are concerned - fact reported in the OSCE report as well.